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AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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October 28, 2005

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: J. Tyler McCauley 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S WAY FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Children's Way Foster Family Agency (Children's Way), a Foster Family Agency service provider. The review was conducted by the Auditor-Controller's Countywide Contract Monitoring Division.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) contracts with Children's Way, a private, non-profit, community-based organization to recruit, train, and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Children's Way is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. Children's Way has offices in Los Angeles, Lancaster and San Bernardino and oversees a total of 71 certified foster homes in which 118 DCFS children were placed. Children's Way is located in the Fourth and Fifth Districts.

DCFS pays Children's Way a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Funding and Rate Bureau. Based on the child's age, Children's Way receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these amounts, Children's Way pays the foster parents

between \$624 and \$790 per month, per child. For Fiscal Year 2004-05, DCFS paid Children's Way approximately \$2,350,000.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether the Agency provided the services outlined in their Program Statement and County contract. We also evaluated the Agency's ability to achieve planned staffing levels. Our monitoring visit included verifying whether Children's Way received the appropriate reimbursement rate for each child and whether the certified foster parents received their portion of the reimbursement rate in a timely manner. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files, and interviewed the Agency's staff, the children and the foster parents. We also visited a sample of certified foster homes.

Results of Review

Generally, Children's Way provided the services outlined in its County contract. The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations, and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. Children's Way also maintained documentation to support the services billed to DCFS and employed qualified staff to perform those services.

Children's Way staff did not always detect unsafe conditions at the foster homes during their monthly visits to the homes. For three (25%) of the 13 foster homes visited, the homes had safety issues that Children's Way staff should have detected. For example, one home had a swimming pool and spa without safety gates or covers. In a second home, the window in one child's bedroom had security bars with an inoperable latch release. The window in the second child's bedroom was obstructed with a piece of furniture and a portable air conditioner. In both instances, the children would be prevented from using the windows to exit the home in case of an emergency. Children's Way also did not always include a closing summary in the children's Termination Reports as required by the County contract. Subsequent to our review, the Agency and foster parents corrected all issues identified.

The details of our review, along with recommendations for corrective action, are attached.

Review of Report

On October 17, 2005, we discussed our report with Children's Way who agreed with the findings. In their attached response, Children's Way management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Children's Way for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions, or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (626) 293-1102.

JTM:MMO:DC

Attachment

c: David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
David Sanders, Ph.D., Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Dr. William Marshall, Director, Children's Way Foster Family Agency
Colleen Anderson, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

**COUNTYWIDE CONTRACT MONITORING DIVISION
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2005-2006
CHILDREN'S WAY FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY**

PROGRAM SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Children's Way Foster Family Agency (Children's Way or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 Regulations.

Verification

We visited 13 of the 71 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Children's Way billed DCFS for in March and April 2005 and interviewed the 13 foster parents and the 16 children placed in the 13 homes. We also reviewed the documentation in the case files for the 13 foster parents and 16 children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

Overall, Children's Way provided the services required by its County contract and Title 22 regulations. The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoy living with their foster parents. The foster parents were certified and were given appropriate training by Children's Way as required by the County contract.

The Agency needs to improve their oversight of the foster homes to ensure that the foster homes are complying with all the provisions of the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Agency needs to ensure that reports contain all information required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitations

- For three (23%) of 13 homes visited, safety and home maintenance issues were identified. In one of the three homes, the foster parents did not secure sharp gardening tools and saws. In another home, a swimming pool and spa did not have safety gates or covers as required by the County contract. In addition, a wading pool was not emptied after being used by the children as required by the County contract. In the third home, there were three large holes in the wall alongside the bottom of the stairwell. The County contract and Title 22 regulations require Agencies to

ensure that foster parents provide homes and yards that are safe and free from hazards. Subsequent to our review, the foster parents corrected all issues identified.

- For one (8%) of 13 homes visited, two of the children's bedroom windows were obstructed. One window was blocked by a piece of furniture and a portable air conditioner. The other window had security bars with an inoperable latch release. In both instances, the children would be prevented from using the windows to exit the home in case of emergency. Subsequent to our review, the foster parent moved the furniture and the air conditioner from the one bedroom window and fixed the release latch on the other bedroom window.
- For one (8%) of 13 homes visited, the foster parent maintained a lock on the refrigerator doors at night. The foster parent stated that they locked the refrigerator doors at night because the children caused a disturbance at night by getting into the refrigerator. Title 22 regulations require that each home does not interfere with children's daily living functions, including eating. Subsequent to our review, the Agency had the foster parent remove the lock from the refrigerator.
- For one (8%) of 13 homes visited, the foster parent did not provide a dresser for the children to store their clothing. In addition, the foster parent used the children's bedroom to store an unused refrigerator which posed a safety hazard. The County contract and Title 22 regulations do not permit a foster child's bedroom to be used for storage purposes and that homes are safe and free from hazards. Subsequent to our review, the foster parent provided two dressers and removed the refrigerator from the children's room.
- For one (8%) of 13 homes visited, the foster parent did not maintain a daily medication log for the foster child as required by the County contract.

Reporting Requirements

- 19 (53%) of 36 termination reports, for children whose placement ended during March and April 2005, did not contain a detailed closing summary of the Agency's records relating to the child's placement as required by the County contract.

Children's Way management needs to ensure that staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure the foster homes comply with the County contract requirements and Title 22 regulations. Specifically, Children's Way should require staff to thoroughly perform monthly home inspections to ensure homes are safe, free from hazards or restrictions, and do not use foster children's rooms for storage. Children's Way staff also need to ensure that parents maintain daily medication logs for foster children. In addition, Children's Way needs to ensure that Termination Reports contain all information required by the County contract.

Recommendations**Children's Way management:**

1. Ensure that staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure the foster homes comply with the County contract requirements and Title 22 Regulations.
2. Ensure that Termination Reports contain all information required by the County contract.

CLIENT VERIFICATION**Objective**

To determine whether the program participants actually received the services for which Children's Way billed DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed 16 children placed in 13 certified foster homes and 13 foster parents to confirm the services Children's Way billed to DCFS.

Results

The program participants interviewed stated that the services they received from Children's Way met their expectations and their assigned social workers visited them regularly.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS**Objective**

Determine whether Children's Way's social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Children's Way's administrator, supervising social workers and social worker staff. We also reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for March and April 2005.

Results

Children's Way's 14 social workers maintained an average of 12 cases and four supervising social workers supervised an average of four social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether Children's Way's staff possesses the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether Children's Way conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

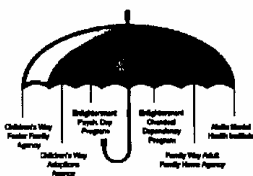
We interviewed Children's Way's administrator, supervising social workers and social workers. In addition, we reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

Children's Way's program director, supervisors and social workers possessed the required education and work experience required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, Children's Way appropriately completed hiring clearances and provided ongoing training to staff assigned to the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.



Children's Way Foster Family Agency

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October 4, 2005

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Children's Way Foster Family Agency

SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S WAY FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY,
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM CONTRACT REVIEW,
FISCAL YEAR 2005- 2006

After reviewing the program contract report for fiscal year 2005- 2006, which was conducted by the Department of Auditor-Controller Countywide Contract Monitoring Division, County of Los Angeles, Children's Way Foster Family Agency is in general agreement with the findings.

As a result of the review, two (2) recommendations were made (immediately following, a corrective action plan was implemented for each of the recommendations):

1. Recommendation:

Ensure that staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure the foster homes comply with the County contract requirements and Title 22 Regulations.

Correction Action Plan:

County and State certified home requirements was immediately reviewed and discussed in a training that all agency social workers, quality assurance staff and certified foster parents have received. Children's Way FFA will require agency social workers to be more thorough when they complete a Monthly Home Walk Through Inspection of the interior/exterior plant of the home. This includes ensuring their yards are safe and free from hazards, that the children's bedroom security bars have release handles that are operable, windows are not obstructed, that refrigerator doors are not locked at any time, that no bedroom shall be used for storage purposes and that the interior walls are clean and in good repair.

Pools, ponds, spas, hot tubs, and other bodies of water constructed subsequent to certification shall be approved by the Administrator prior to their use and shall be as

required by the County contract. Certified foster parents have been reminded to empty any wading pools after each use. Quality Assurance staff and social workers shall be more thorough, as is stated in our policy, when they inspect the certified foster home for compliance monthly and during the annual recertification process.

Certified Foster Parents received another training on the requirement of maintaining daily medication logs, as appropriate.

2. Recommendation:

Ensure that Termination Reports contain all information required by the County contract.

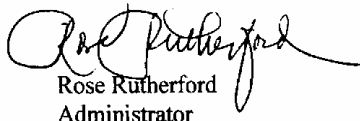
Corrective Action Plan:

Revisions have been made to the old Termination Report, including a newly named Discharge Summary for placements 0-30 days and a Discharge Report for placements over 30 days to include all the information required by the LA County contract and Title 22 Regulations. The agency social workers from all three locations have been trained on how to properly complete the revised discharge summary/ discharge report.

Children's Way FFA takes the responsibility of providing safe, extensive and nurturing foster care to the children of our community seriously. We welcome any constructive feedback to examine how we may improve our program and services and ensure not only total compliance, but quality services to the children and families we care for. We appreciated the professionalism and efficiency which Elaine Clark and Cassandra Youngblood, Auditors and Brian Henricks, CIA demonstrated during this review.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (310) 645-5227, ext. 27.

Sincerely,


Rose Rutherford
Administrator